

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

313

that when he was younger he had been a little frightened ; nowadays if his baby sisters cry he tells them that a devil will come and take them, and they stop at once. By the house of his lamaist instructor at Purfong there was a big tree which was the home of Jamfi moong. One evening this devil leant over the roof of the house, black and high as the sky ; his teacher burnt a bunch of herbs and smoked a cigarette at it, whereupon it took itself off to the forest, whistling as it went. The visit of this devil did not produce any untoward results, but Chimpet admitted that at the time he was a little frightened. 869 776 152

Besides devils most children are frightened of houses in which there has been a recent death and of burial- or burning-places, and will usually run past them as quickly as they can. This fear persists as a motive for panic longer than the fear of meeting incarnated devils ; thus twenty-two-year-old Rigya, after saying that as a child he used to run away from such places, later admitted that it was only in the last year that he was able to walk by them at an ordinary pace. Nearly all adults have a certain fear of devils when alone in the deep forest or on high mountains ; and alone in the forest everybody is frightened of snakes and wild beasts ; but these fears are perfectly rational ; people are still occasionally poisoned by snakes and mauled by bears. 152

It sometimes happens that smaller children will be bullied by older ones ; but this is rare, and if it does occur the children will be rescued either by their parents or elder brothers or by any adults present and the bullies will be well punished. As with other Lepcha relationships, love between siblings is not considered automatic ; it is usual however, and there is a cultural expectation that elder brothers and sisters will instruct, help and protect their younger siblings who out of gratitude will love them in return. 865

Those children who are going to become lamas usually start to learn to read about the age of twelve ; but here too there is no definite rule, and instruction may start three or four years earlier or later. Lepchas under instruction appear to regard their lessons as an unpleasant piece of extra work, only made tolerable by the hope of easy gain in the future. Except for future lamas or carpenters Lepchas appear to have finished most of their formal education by about the age of twelve. Children of that age could usually identify for me as many plants and trees as their elders ; children under ten usually knew very few. [824]

Very few children have an alternative home to go to if they feel 591 ●

- 591 unhappy in their own; near paternal relations usually live in the same house, and maternal relations generally live far away. If, however, there is living in the neighbourhood a maternal grandfather or married aunt children can always go and pay them short visits. Thus Chimpet, who was not very happy at home and who was rather neglected in favour of the numerous younger children, used to go fairly frequently to visit his maternal grandfather, the Lharibu Chujen at the next village of Panung; sometimes he would go by invitation, either alone or with other members of his family, and at other times he would run away there of his own accord for a few days; no comment was raised if he did so. There are, however, very few children who have such an alternative home.

- 152 Only and adopted children are often very lonely, but except for these it is I think extremely rare for a child to be actively unhappy at home. The girl Prumtu was the only really unhappy child in Lingthem; after her perhaps came Chélé, who has been discussed earlier;⁹ he lived alone with his old grandfather and a distantly related middle-aged woman. Besides Chélé, Pursang, Chano's second son who was for so long suckled by his aunt, occasionally threatens suicide; he has no obvious reasons for being unhappy but he is a rather difficult character, and shows some signs of turning into a bad boy, a *tané*.

- 858 For the majority of Lepchas childhood is not an actively unhappy time, but a time of obscurity, of being unimportant; children are not taken much notice of and their tastes are little consulted. But most of the children realise, though perhaps they would not enunciate it so clearly as their parents, that the obscurity and occasional harshness of these earlier years are a necessary preliminary and training for the wholly desirable goal of full adult status.

⁹ See Chapter Six, p. 164-165.

replied that since the woman had herself come and implored¹⁵⁹ him to sleep with her he did not feel in any way responsible. A village meeting was now held and the brother attended to give his own version of the story. He was, however, held to be the guilty party and ordered to pay for the ceremonies. When he went to the meeting he took with him one pig, a load of millet for making *chi*, and a large quantity of grain. These he intended to give as a peace offering. "It is true," he said, "that this girl and I have lived together": but more than this he would not say. The same evening, when they¹⁵⁹ were all sitting quietly at home, Karma saw his brother⁷⁶² climb up the ladder into the attic store-room, where the²²⁴ poison used for hunting was kept. He stayed there some minutes and Karma heard him mumbling to himself about being found guilty, and saying that he could not possibly raise the means to pay. He tottered down the steps and into the yard, walked three steps forward and back again, and then made as if to fall. He appeared to be beside himself with rage, and was holding his unsheathed knife in his hand and shouting out that he would kill anyone who came near. His mother now rushed out and took him by the right hand and Karma clasped his left. With difficulty they threw him to the ground, for he had now become violent. Karma tried to force his brother's mouth open. He could see that his tongue was black and swollen, and his hands were tightly clenched. These, he knew, were the signs of poison. He shouted to his younger brother to run at once and bring some wild raspberry roots, also some chickens' excreta, this being¹⁵⁷ a well-known emetic. He quickly ground the two together and forced the mixture down his brother's throat. By this time, however, his body had started to stiffen and he died a few minutes later.

After he had been living at home for some time Karma fell¹⁵⁹ in love with a woman fourteen years his senior, the sister of a man named Gongyop. He had known this girl for some time, but had always considered himself too poor to marry. Since¹⁵⁹ she, however, was not at all anxious to leave her brother's⁵⁹¹

- comfortable home, a compromise was arranged by which
- 159 Karma went to live with her, working in Gongyop's fields in order to earn the bride price. Soon after this he became very ill. At the time the family was living in temporary huts in the fields. It was a busy time of the year, and this did away with the long walk to and from the house. His wife was working
- 159 in the fields with her son by a previous husband, and Karma lay on his back in the hut watching them. Suddenly he felt queer; he thought he saw many people coming towards him, and he could hardly breathe. He called to his wife, but she took no notice and still went on with her work. Shortly after this he thought he saw the Hlaribu coming into the hut. He asked him where he was going. He said he had heard that Karma had recently bought a turquoise earring from Jiroong and asked if he might see it. This was true, and the earring was hanging on the wall above his head at the time.
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435] Karma told the Hlaribu that he had paid four rupees for it, which the latter said was a reasonable price. All this time he was pouring with sweat. He saw many people peering at him from outside the house; some of them had huge goitres and each looked as though he was perched on the back of the person behind. He heard them laughing and talking and distinctly remembers one man saying: "Look at Karma! he has turned from a needle into a bodkin!" Karma again called out to his wife. He felt that the roof of the house was gradually contracting and coming slowly down, as though to crush him. He made no attempt to get to the door, and while he was doing this his wife and her son came into the house. They thought that he was dead, as he was lying stretched out on the floor and was motionless. His wife ran off to call a friend, who came at once and lighted incense. Later on some men came and carried him up to Gongyop's house, where he eventually recovered. The only other serious illness he has ever had was when he was ten years old, and this lasted for more than three months. His mother, who was a Mun, divined
- [787] the cause of the trouble and saw that he could only recover by becoming a Padim, a sort of Mun with limited powers.

Karma and his wife continued to live with Gongyop for [59] several more years; but on the death of the former's step-father they went to live with his mother. His wife died in 1932, and his mother the following year. He soon married again, and his second wife bore him two children, the first of which died shortly after birth. Six months after the birth of the second child his wife died; and it is her mother who at present keeps house for him. Last year he was again betrothed and hopes to be married next year. In the meantime his future bride already has a baby seven months old. Karma believes in "Bloomsbury" morals; for he lived with [336] his first wife for six years before he troubled to marry her; and when he finally decided to regularise his position he even went to the trouble of carrying out all the preliminary formalities, including a formal betrothal. He never thought it necessary to be faithful to any of his wives, and believes he is the father of at least two bastards. Of all our informants he was the most forthcoming and particularly enjoyed talking about himself. He was much more arrogant than the [57] average Lepcha, and would probably have fitted better into a somewhat more forceful society. Had the army been open to him as a profession he would quickly have become a non-commissioned officer; for above all things he liked to order others about. For this reason he enjoys his post of Karbari, and I imagine will be far less happy when he has to obey orders rather than give them himself. The others think he is proud and a boaster, but say that he always speaks the truth. He is the type that in an European culture would be found standing at the street corner, hands in pockets, with a cigarette drooping from his lips. He would quickly degenerate if he ever lived in a town, and might easily take to a life of crime. I never liked him very much, but of all the Lingtem people he was easily the most useful.

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The Hilaribu does not live in Lingtem; but since he is an [59] active member of the local monastery and appears in many [53]

CHAPTER 10

CHILDREN

LEPCHAS are patrilineal and, in common with most ⁶¹¹ of the people of India who trace descent from the ⁵⁹⁶ father, live under what is known as the joint-family system. Under this system the family remains more or less intact, since it is only the girls who leave their parental home ^[591] on marriage. There are occasions, of course, when brothers decide to separate, but, generally speaking, the land remains undivided and is worked by the members of the family as a whole.

"A child born into a community divided into clans," ^{or} notes Rivers, * "becomes a member of a domestic group other than the family in the strict sense; and this is reflected in the terms of kinship that he addresses to those around him. The system of relationship found in these circumstances is called classificatory because whole groups of relatives are classed with the father, mother, brother, sister, and so forth, and receive the same terms of address. That is to say, relatives are grouped in classes. Thus, a person will give to a large number of men the term which he applies to his own father; to a large class of women he gives the same name as that he uses for his mother; and this applies even to the relationship of husband and wife. Thus, the distinctions of uncle, aunt, and cousin that play so fundamental a part in our system of relationship are largely obliterated in communities with moieties and clans."

The Lepchas use a very simple form of classificatory ⁶⁰¹ relationship, in which, however, the biological father and mother are clearly distinguished. It would be of no interest to the general reader to burden this account with a list of the words in use to denote the various relationships; but one

* *Social Organization*. W. H. R. Rivers. London, 1926.

842 born to be a girl, as in this case she can look after subsequent children and relieve her mother. Apart from this, there seems a slight preference for boys; for, in addition to the help they are able to give in the fields, it means that there is someone to look after the parents when they are too old to work for themselves, whereas girls leave home on marriage, except in very rare circumstances.

855 Once a child is big enough to look after itself—that is when
[556] it reaches the age of four or five—it is left more or less to its
857 own devices; and unless a boy is to become a Lama he
[571] receives no formal training such as is given to the ordinary European child. Nor is a girl taught how to cook, but by watching her mother and doing odd jobs about the house she gradually acquires the necessary skill. Little girls are fond of playing at making toy houses and it is a common sight to see them pretending to cook with leaves and mud,
[524] but I never saw a girl playing with a doll and was told that they are unknown.

Small boys seem to spend most of their time wandering about with a pellet-bow; and stilt-walking is a popular
[534] amusement. Most boys also play the flute, which is merely a length of thin bamboo with five holes for stops.

593 Most people are of the opinion that the ideal family consists of from three to four girls and from four to five boys. If there are too many boys there will not, unless the family is very rich, be enough to feed them all when they grow up and marry. As a matter of fact, the average family in Lingtem is extremely small, and a number of couples are childless. Since the average number of children does not give an indication of the true state of affairs, I have given the composition of each of the families in Talung in Appendix 1,

593 to which the reader is referred. It will be noted that a very
842 high proportion of the women appear to be sterile, a matter which causes great concern to the people themselves, who realise that their numbers are steadily dwindling, and who desire children above all things. This question of sterility is perhaps the greatest problem with which the Lepchas

1 [See cat. 116, p. 301—Analysis]

SEX

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This little ceremony, if it can be dignified by such a name, is called *Pi-bo azom*. 585
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This completes the second day's proceedings; but, as before, drinking and conversation are continued well into the night. At about one a.m. one of the *Pi-bos* goes round with a large bowl of the special ceremonial unstrained *chi* and offers it to each of those present. As before, it is not consumed: it is merely offered as an indication that the day's ceremonies are over and that everyone should from then onwards at least talk quietly if he does not wish to sleep. 585

On the third morning everyone is again wakened with a bowl of *chi*. Lights, however, are not again served, but on this occasion all the guests are given *Tum cheu*, or the entrails of the bullock killed the day before, stuffed with meat of various kinds. These are prepared by the *Changku*, who, as we have already noted, is in entire charge of the distribution of meat. This meal of sausage is followed by another of ordinary rice and vegetables, on top of which is put a hunk of raw beef for each member of the bride party. As her attendants leave for home each one tears a bit off the joint he has received and returns it to the donor: this symbolises the presentation of a return gift. 585
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The marriage is now over and the bridegroom makes ready to escort the bride, together with all her attendants, back to her home. Before they leave they are presented with a special gift of food called *Lom-to Lom-chong*, which consists of eight pounds of chi-millet and eight pounds of rice. This is meant to be consumed on the way back; but even if the two houses are only a few hundred yards apart the present must be given just the same. The party also takes with it a present known as *Dong-chong Dong-len*, which consists of a load of chi-millet for the bride's parents. 585
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When the party reaches the girl's home the bride and bridegroom remain there for either three or seven days; but they must on no account leave on any of the intervening days, which are considered inauspicious. When they finally leave for the husband's home they are given a present called 585
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585 *Gor-nen*, which is made up of sixteen pounds of grain of various
 591 sorts and one complete load of chi-millet. As soon as the pair
 [431] reach home the *Gor shun*, which, as we have already seen, was
 specially constructed for the accommodation of the bride's
 party, is knocked down without further ceremony; but it
 should on no account be demolished until the husband
 returns with his wife.

591 Seven days later husband and wife once again set off for
 [431] the girl's home, taking with them the inevitable load of chi-
 millet, and eight pounds of grain. Nothing is laid down as to
 when they should return; and from this time the pair
 continues to divide its time between the two houses, or at
 least to pay periodical visits to the girl's home.

[431] One year after marriage a girl may, if she feels so disposed,
 present her parents with a pig's carcass and another load of
 chi-millet. This is known as *Nyim phet*; and when it is given
 it is customary for the parents to make a return present of a
 milch cow: this is called *Pi jong*. The cow is not, however,
 actually given to the girl but is merely shown her. If she
 gives her parents another *Nyim phet* the following year the *Pi
 jong* becomes her property and she may then take the cow
 away with her when she leaves.

585 Whatever we may think of Lepcha marriage, it does at
 571 least afford a chance for the village to break away for a day
 or two from its otherwise dull routine, and gives people from
 distant villages an excuse to meet and talk things over.
 Moreover, everybody knows exactly what he is expected to
 contribute: in lean times the dictates of custom are sufficiently
 observed by putting as little as a couple of annas in the *Ong
 kay*. But in any case the guest is free from our periodic night-
 mare of "what shall I give?"; and the bride and bridegroom
 in their turn are spared an accumulation of the Lepcha
 equivalent of unwanted plated cruets. It all seems admirably
 contrived; and a good time is had by all.

587 14th March:

Ongden, a man of fifty and the father of the largest family

587 but the party was continued until dawn the next day. Since this was not a first marriage the full three-day festivities were not carried out: nor will Ongden and his bride make the usual ceremonial visit to her people. In this particular case there was, I gather, really no need for him to have done any ceremony except the formal betrothal; but since he is [554] a man of standing in the village he has preferred to do things properly. In any case, no Lepcha will miss the opportunity of throwing a party, provided the necessary funds are available.

15th March:

A number of "corpses" lying about under the bushes. Most of these had removed themselves by nightfall.

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583 Before betrothal a boy usually does a certain amount of work for his future father-in-law, and may even stay in his house should he happen to live in the same village. This service is entirely voluntary and is in no sense looked upon as payment for the bride. After the formal betrothal has taken place, however, the girl's parents can call upon the boy's services for a period of three years; but if the marriage takes place within this period the obligation ceases.

● 591 When a man has a daughter and no sons he arranges, if 584 possible, that his son-in-law shall live in his house, in which case the boy becomes what is known as a *Komok myok*. In these circumstances he is treated exactly as though he were the real son of the house, except that he has a less hard time. It is not always easy for a man to obtain a *Komok myok* for his daughter; for unless such a boy has several brothers his father will not normally wish to lose him, since it means that he will have no one to help him work his own fields.

431 When a man is so poor that he cannot afford even the 585 minimum marriage gifts everyone in the village helps him. This is looked upon as a gift and is not repayable. It is,

23: Benedict

184, 192, 582, 591, 602, 611, 613, 614, 616,
618, 621

AL1 Southeast Asia

Lepcha AK5

/For lists of kinship terms, and for excellent and detailed information concerning correlations between kinship terminology, patterns of behavior, and social institutions, see category 601./